



Montana Nurses Association

20 Old Montana State Highway 1 Clancy, MT 56934
(406) 442-6710 Voice 1 (406) 442-1841 Fax
www.mtnurses.org info@mtnurses.org

PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE & SAFETY

Exhibit No.

16

1/14/2011

SB2

TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 2 BEFORE THE SENATE PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE AND SAFETY COMMITTEE - JANUARY 14, 2011

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, for the record my name is Don Judge and I'm appearing here today on behalf of the Montana Nurses' Association in support of Senate Bill 2.

The Montana Nurses' Association membership includes Registered Nurses and Advanced Practice Registered Nurses throughout the state, including many of those who serve as "school nurses" in Montana's public school systems. As such, the MNA is fully aware of the concerns expressed by our membership that children who live in poverty are at greater risk of developing serious and ultimately expensive health care problems which may be avoided through preventative care programs such as that proposed in Senate Bill 2.

Most people probably think that a public school nurse is an individual who simply cleans and bandages playground cuts and bruises or calls a parent when a child is sick and is sent home. In reality, their role is much greater than that. Although they are limited to what they can do medically to those things which fall within their scope of practice, they often have to make judgments and recommendations based upon their professional observations of a child's symptoms.

In addition to their duties such as administering prescription medication to children with diabetes, arthritis or some other chronic ailment, they also attempt to locate the cause of conditions such as eye-aches, headaches, nausea, vomiting, or aches and pains not related to incidents of bruising from slips or falls.

And, our members see daily the effects on children who do not have access to regular, affordable preventative care and treatment. Some examples:

- (1) A child with an untreated eye infection may result in expensive emergency room visits and potentially a loss of vision clarity leaving a child whose ability to read books or the black board can leave them slow to learn and fall behind their peers. A child who needs, but doesn't have access to glasses can produce headaches and impair learning.
- (2) A child with an untreated ear infection may result in expensive emergency room visits and headaches and pain so severe that it also impacts a child's learning ability and progress.
- (3) A child with an untreated tooth or gum problem can not only result in significant pain, but also in stomach and digestive problems which, again, can end up in an expensive emergency room visit in addition to potentially expensive dental work.

While a school nurse can help observe these conditions and make referrals for treatment or prevention of further problems, they are not in a position of providing the preventative care needed to keep the problems from occurring in the first place.

Senate Bill 2 attempts to give authority to a set of professional Dental Hygienists who are in the position and do have the skills training required to provide preventative care services to children who are vulnerable to infection and tooth disease. To our members who see the results of the absence of preventative care, it only makes humane and cost-effective sense to give kids a fighting chance to make it through our educational system with one less health concern to worry about.

Montana would not be the first state to provide dental hygienists with Limited Access Permits to provide this kind of care in our public schools. In fact, we would become the 40th state to allow such a program should SB 2 be adopted.

The Center for Disease Control in 2009 recommended the use of sealants as a means of managing early decay and lowering bacteria levels. They have estimated that if only 50% of the children who are at risk participate in school sealant programs over half of their tooth decay would be prevented and money would be saved on their treatment costs. Imagine, here in Montana where we have a significant percentage of our kids living in poverty, how much better life would be for those kids and how much money we could save if the CDC estimates hold true?

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, the Montana Nurses' Association encourages you to take this important step in not only making the lives of thousands of Montana's school children better, but also in taking a big step in reducing the cost of health care in our state.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,



Don Judge
Montana Nurses' Association